(c) the quantum of LPG imported during the year 2003-04 and the steps taken by Government to bridge the gap between supply and demand thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (c) Domestic production of LPG is less than domestic consumption. As a result, a part of domestic consumption is met through imports. During 2003-04, 1.708 Million Metric Tonnes of LPG was imported. The setting up of refineries is decontrolled and any capacities, which may *inter alia* produce additional LPG, would come up on commercial considerations.

Merger of mega oil companies

542. SHRI TARIQ ANWAR: Will the Minister of PETROLUEM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is a proposal to create two mega players in the oil sector by merging State-owned oil companies;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the names and the equity shares of the two companies?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) No formal proposal to create two mega players in the oil sector by merging State-owned oil companies has been formulated.

(b) and (c) Do not arise, in view of (a) above.

Merger of IBP with IOC

543. SHRI SANJAY NIRUPAM: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have approved the merger of petro-retailer IBP Co. with Indian Oil Corporation (IOC); and

(b) if so, the details regarding the above and whether it would result in the falling of Government shareholding?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) The Government have conveyed their approval, in principle, to the Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOC) with

reference to the latter's preliminary proposal for merger of IBP Co. Limited with it. Final approval of the Government in this regard will depend on the detailed scheme of amalgamation.

Availability of petrol and gas in Himalayas

†544. SHRI KRIPAL PARMAR: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn towards distinct possibilities of availability of petrol and gas in the Himalayas as per the conclusion of scientists after analyzing data collected from the Himalayas; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the expenditure likely to be incurred on the same and the time period of the said programme and by when success is likely to be achieved?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC) have been carrying out exploration activities for oil & gas in the Himalayan region since its inception in 1956 but without any commercial success so far. ONGC continues to acquire geo-scientific data in the Himalayas with the aim of identifying prospective areas. In addition, Oil India Ltd. (OIL) is also carrying out its exploration activities in the Himalayan foothills since 1990.

(b) Exploration for hydrocarbons has been carried out in the lower Himalayan Foothills, lying to the south and south east of the mountainous Himalayan Region and in Karewa basin (in the Kashmir Valley).

ONGC since inception (as on 1.10.2004) has acquired 8,027 Ground Line Kilometre (GLK) of 2D seismic data and drilled 18 wells in the Himalayan foothills and Karewa basin in the Himalayan region, but without any commercial success so far. However, ONGC is pursuing its exploration activities to get a breakthrough in these areas.

Presently, ONGC is holding three Petroleum Exploration Licenses (PELs), two in the State of Himachal Pradesh and one in the State of Jammu & Kashmir. During 2004-05, ONGC has planned 2D seismic acquisition in the exploration block HF-ONN-2001/1, awarded under New Exploration Licensing Policy III(NELP-III). OIL is operating in two PEL areas. 6,171 GLK of 2D seismic data has been acquired as on 31.3.2004. One exploratory well was drilled near Bilaspur, in which presence of hydrocarbon was indicated, but without commercial discovery.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.